

Wet Breaks and Headless Trophies

Chapter 6

James raised his eyebrow questioningly at William.

William nodded and James stretched out his hands for Mrs Cruikshank to see. She let out a howl of delight.

"He has mud all over his hands too!" she yelled. "He **MUST** be guilty. Take him away, Mrs Steeper. Get this child out of my sight."

"No, no, no," said William. "His muddy hands prove that he's **NOT** the villain."

"And how do you work that one out, worm?" snarled Mrs Cruikshank.

"James's hands were muddy at morning break and they've stayed muddy since then," explained William. "He came into the building to wash the mud off. As he passed this classroom he saw your trophy in pieces on the classroom floor. He panicked because he'd seen Mrs Steeper when he came inside, and she might have thought that he was the criminal. So he ran to hide in the library without washing the mud off his hands."

"Well, he might well be the criminal," snapped Mrs Cruikshank.

"No," insisted William. "If he had smashed the trophy, it and your cabinet would be smeared with mud."

Mrs Cruikshank scowled and examined both. There wasn't a speck of mud on either the cabinet or the trophy. All she could see were some tiny black marks.

The room suddenly burst into a chorus of whispers and mutterings.

"Therefore," went on William, "if the trophy wasn't broken by James it must have been broken by someone or something else and I think I know who it was."

Everyone's eyes swivelled to face William. Was he just trying to get his friend out of trouble or was he about to reveal the truth?

"Who is it?" demanded Mrs Cruikshank. "Who is the trophy-wrecking vandal? Put them in the wrestling ring with me and I will bash them and crash them and smash them to pieces!"

"Look at those tiny marks again," said William.

Mrs Cruikshank glared at him and then took a careful look at the broken bits of her trophy. "They could be anything," she snarled.

"James told me that when he was outside the class looking at the smashed trophy, he saw something blurry crash out through one of the classroom windows," said William.

"Was it Mr French?" asked Mrs Cruikshank. "He does love high jumping."

"No," replied William. "I think it was a bird. I believe those marks on the trophy are a bird's claw marks. I reckon a bird must have flown in through the open window and knocked your trophy onto the floor. Remember what Mrs Steeper said: 'I did leave it in a *precarious* position at the edge of your desk.'"

"A bird, you say," mouthed Mrs Cruikshank, her blood-red cheeks getting a bit whiter. "If you are making up some silly story then you will be in massive trouble: do you hear me?"

William nodded.



Every child in the class was staring at William as if he were the greatest detective alive. James was staring at him because it looked like William might just be about to save his life.

"Well, I must say, it makes sense," said Mrs Steeper. "You do leave your windows open, Mrs Cruikshank, so a bird could easily fly in."

For a few seconds Mrs Cruikshank was silent. The atmosphere in the classroom was electric. What would be her next move? Would she pick William up and throw him like a javelin into the corridor, or accept his theory and believe him?

"William," she finally said very slowly, "for a child, I am quite impressed by your powers of deduction."

Everyone gasped. Mrs Cruikshank *never* praised anyone.

"My dad runs a key-cutting and trophy shop," blurted out Lucinda. "I'll get him to make you an exact copy of your broken trophy, Mrs Cruikshank. You won't be able to tell the difference."

"Nice one," said William.

For a brief second the whole class clapped and cheered, before being reminded of where they were by the booming voice of their now much calmer class teacher.

"Thank you Lucinda," said Mrs Steeper. "When you bring in the new trophy I will use it for an assembly. In the meantime, for today's assembly I will be handing out a very special certificate for a most excellent piece of detective work!"

Mrs Steeper smiled towards William and with that she walked out of the classroom.

Mrs Cruikshank nodded at William and James and they hurried over to their places.

"What a remarkable set of events has happened here today," said Mrs Cruikshank, "but now it is time for our history lesson on those wrestling champion Romans!"

The boys sat in their respective places and History finally got underway.

"Thanks, you two," James whispered to William and Lucinda as they looked at Roman artefacts. "You got me out of a big heap of trouble."

"No sweat," Lucinda replied, smiling, "I overheard the dinner staff talking about one of their tins of mushy peas going missing. I suggested that they might like to pay that knucklehead Sean a visit."

They all laughed.

"William the Detective, eh?" said James thoughtfully as he checked out a Roman helmet. "I think I might have just found a new assistant for the Dark Destroyer!"

